

Global Perspectives on Industrial Transformation in the American South. *Edited by Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005. 240 pp. Tables, notes, index. Paper, \$24.95. ISBN: 0-826-21583-1.

Reviewed by Stephen A. West

This collection is the inaugural volume in a series that aims, as the editors write, to offer a “reassessment of the South’s economy from the antebellum days to the present” (p. ix). The nine essays here—some by recent Ph.D.s and others by advanced scholars—seek to reevaluate the role of industry in the American South by placing the region’s economic structures and thought in an international context.

Five essays focus predominantly on the antebellum era. As a group, they do less to break new ground than to revisit familiar debates about the extent and nature of industrial development in the slave South. Several are animated by the views that Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman declared more than thirty years ago in *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (1974), and that Engerman restates in the first essay here: namely, that the Old South was much more economically dynamic than many historians acknowledge, and that the region’s lack of industry in comparison to parts of the American North was due not to the presence of slavery, but rather to the South’s comparative advantage in agriculture. Shearer Davis Bowman pursues some of those points in a review of recent literature on the economic history of the antebellum and postbellum South, drawing on his own earlier work to compare southern planters and Prussian Junkers.

John Majewski and Viken Tchakerian set their comparative sights closer to home, arguing that industrial development in the antebellum South lagged behind that of the American Midwest because of low population densities that made for higher transportation costs and smaller markets. Separate essays by Susanna Delfino and Brian Schoen explore how leading southerners viewed their region’s place in the national and international economy before the Civil War. Delfino compares contemporary and historical views on the antebellum southern economy to those regarding nineteenth-century southern Italy, while Schoen emphasizes the “broad consensus for free trade” that

first emerged in the South during the cotton boom of the 1820s and found renewed support during the 1850s as southerners sought an alternative to their region's commercial reliance on an increasingly hostile North (p. 67).

In terms of both subject matter and method, the most innovative essays are those that look beyond the antebellum era. Turning her attention to the late eighteenth century, Emma Hart argues that the occupational structure among artisans in Charleston resembled that of provincial British "leisure towns," which eschewed heavy manufacturing and provided luxury goods and services to elites from the surrounding countryside. The remaining three contributions focus on the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, when something approaching an industrial transformation of the region began in earnest. Beth English examines why a Massachusetts textile firm began shifting its operations to Alabama during the 1890s, and finds that the "parts played by labor, management, and state governments" have a good bit in common with a process that continues on a global scale today (p. 176). Erin Elizabeth Clune explores the attempts by New South boosters to attract European immigrants around the turn of the century. Those efforts failed almost uniformly, but Clune argues that they reveal how the region's promoters shared impulses toward racial and labor control that ran throughout the post-emancipation economies of the Atlantic world. An essay by David L. Carlton and Peter Coclanis looks at the worldwide development of the textile industry from the late nineteenth century onward as it spread from its established core in Old and New England, not just to the American South but also to Brazil, India, and Japan. The American South, they contend, "was unique among 'less-developed' regions in that it was *American*"—distinguished, that is, by wages that were low for the United States but high by world standards, and that ultimately undercut southern manufacturers' ability to compete globally in the bulk production of cheap goods (p. 174).

Carlton and Coclanis do perhaps the most of any contributors to live up to the promise of "global perspectives" in the volume's title; few of the others range beyond the United States and Europe. Since the editors invoke the inspiration of "the fresh perspectives of Atlantic history," it is also worth noting that most of the essays here are concerned less with exchanges and patterns that cross national boundaries—the approach that characterizes much recent scholarship on the Atlantic world—than with comparisons

between the American South and other discrete regions and countries (p. 6). While that reliance on the familiar methods of comparative history does not detract from the merits of any individual essay, it does cause the volume as a whole to fall somewhat short of the editors' ambitious goals.

Stephen A. West is associate professor of history at the Catholic University of America. He is the author of the forthcoming book, From Yeoman to Redneck in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1850–1915.